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ABSTRACT

Trends which will affect institutions of higher learning and their libraries in 20 years are discernable now. Though the conventional structure of education will be basically the same, more flexible and individual patterns--the open university, extended degrees, universities without walls, and expedited programs--will continue to develop. Enrollments will follow population patterns, probably increasing somewhat to 1980, then stabilizing or dropping off. This will exacerbate the already troublesome financial problems of colleges and universities, inevitably increasing the per-student cost of higher education. Thus the financial problems of academic libraries will be even greater, given the information explosion, inflation rates, the demand for expensive non-print materials, and the trend toward restricted library budgets. Some solutions to the problem may be found in cooperative programs, networks, computer applications, increased use of microforms, centralized storage, regional media centers, interlibrary loans, and improved management. (LS)

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ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: INTO THE EIGHTIES

Arthur Monke

Patterns of higher education twenty years from now are likely to vary, though not greatly, from those we know today. The exact nature of the changes that will occur and when they will take place are not easy to perceive or to predict with confidence. Because the process of change will be evolutionary and caused and affected by forces that are often not readily identifiable, and certainly not controllable, it is difficult to separate superficial change which takes place almost daily from fundamental trends.

It is likely that the conventional structure of higher education as we know it today will remain basically intact, and the conventional path of four years of college following immediately upon graduation from secondary school, followed at once, or very soon thereafter, by graduate study for those who will pursue advanced work, will probably continue to be the pattern for most students. The present trend toward greater flexibility in individual patterns, however, is likely to continue and, indeed, expand. There will be more stopping out, and more people will reenter the educational process after prolonged interruption. There will also be a good deal of experimentation with institutional models in an effort to offer more flexible programs that can better fit a broad range of individual needs. It is also safe to predict that some of the traditional disciplines will diminish in importance while others will be enhanced. Subject areas will combine in new ways and familiar areas will separate as changing social and economic conditions in the larger society call for new ways of looking at them.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The open university, the extended degree, the university without walls signal some of the changing attitudes and concepts in higher education. Three year BA programs, encouraging qualified students to enter college after completion of the junior year in secondary school, combining BA and MA programs and compressing them into less than the usual time period, are just a few of the changes that have been suggested, and, in some instances, tried. Those which succeed and come to be widely accepted will be incorporated into the broad spectrum that is higher education, but the impact of the changes will not be revolutionary except in broad and long-range terms.

One trend that is highly visible today and whose consequences will have major impact on higher education in the near future is that of enrollments. From 1960 to 1970 enrollment at colleges and universities increased 100 per cent. Projections are for enrollments to continue to rise but at a slower rate. From 1970 to 1980 the increase is expected to be about 40 per cent and after 1980 it will stabilize or decline slightly, following closely future population fluctuations. While some kind of post-secondary training will continue to engage a larger per cent of the population in the years following 1980, higher education in terms of general education will have reached growth maturity by 1980, and its proportionate role in post-secondary training will decline.

Of primary interest to the institutions with which the Committee is concerned is the pattern of enrollments in very recent years. According to the survey of college and university enrollments published each year in Intellect, the 1,416 institutions surveyed showed an increase in student population of 1.8 per cent in the fall of 1973 over the previous year.(22) An informal survey by a New York Times reporter just recently completed predicts a decline in enrollments of about 1 per cent for the fall of 1974.(24)

At the same time, a survey of two-year colleges indicated that enrollments in the fall of 1973 were up 11.6 per cent over that for 1972, which in turn was an increase of 5.7 per cent over the previous year.(23)

Static and possibly even declining enrollments over the next years has significant implications for colleges and universities. Already caught in a severe press between rapidly rising costs and income which does not readily keep pace, the very survival of a growing number of institutions, especially private ones, is threatened. Adjustments, sometimes major ones, are necessary to keep costs and incomes in balance. If the quality of an institution's offering declines significantly, or if it must raise its tuition and fees inordinately to maintain quality, the result inevitably will be an inability to recruit enough students to sustain it, and it is predictable that other marginal institutions will join the growing list of failed ones. There is a pressing need for public funds for private institutions that will narrow the gap between the cost of attending private and public colleges and universities.

The financial problems faced by institutions of higher education today, and for which no ready solutions are at hand for the near future, have been developing for some time. Cheit, in a 1970 survey of 2,340 institutions, found 435 (19 per cent) in financial trouble, 1,000 (42 per cent) headed for trouble, and only 905 (39 per cent) in a relatively stable financial position.(11) He found private institutions more vulnerable to financial strain than public-supported institutions, and the causes for their financial plight were varied. Over- and sometimes unwise expansion, demands for increased programs and services (expanded libraries and expensive computer centers were cited with depressing frequency), rapid increases in instructional costs, and public disillusionment with the

efficacy of higher education to solve national ills were among the causes most frequently cited. The fact that the cost per student for higher education rose 5 per cent annually, compounded, in public institutions during the period from 1949 to 1969, and 7.5 per cent in private institutions, while prices in the general economy rose by only 2 to 3 per cent during the same period perhaps best sums up the basic problem.(3)

It seems clear in any case that the golden age of prosperity for higher education is past and the prospects for its return are dim indeed.

The implications of the foregoing for academic libraries are troublesome. The information explosion, variously estimated at 5 to 15 per cent annual rates of growth in published material, shows no signs of abating. The amount of printed material available is likely to be exceeded by the growth in non-print media, and the share of library resources allocated to acquire, organize and service them is certain to expand in the next decades. Libraries will, therefore, have no way to stem growth rates if they are to respond to the needs of the public they serve. Growing collections translate directly into increasing costs, and with the prospect for stable or declining student enrollments, libraries will be faced with a growing per student cost at a time when parent institutions are under great pressure to restrain the unit cost of higher education.

The problem is compounded by continuing inflation. Materials and equipment costs rise, salaries and wages follow a steady upward trend, and new construction costs are higher year by year. In general, library costs in the two preceding decades have risen faster than the cost of higher education. Library budgets grew at an average annual rate of 10.5 per cent while the cost per student increased by an annual rate of 5 to 7.5 per cent.(3) There is no evidence to indicate that a continuing increase in budgets will not be required for the foreseeable

future if libraries are to sustain today's level of service by traditional patterns, inadequate though that may be in too many instances. Neither is there evidence to indicate funds will be available to sustain such a rate of cost increases. On the contrary, everything points to severe strictures on budget growth in the present decade and into the next. A decline in the level of service is certain unless unit costs of library operations can be held in check or even reduced.

Greater interdependence among libraries is inevitable during the coming decades. Networking, consortia, cooperative centers, interlibrary compacts, already visible in increasing numbers across the nation and operating with varying degrees of success, are likely to increase in scope and effectiveness. Technology will be a greater factor in library processes. Ten years ago it was impossible to find computer applications in libraries which were viable and cost effective. Today, despite a general feeling of disappointment with the gap between computer promise and performance, it is possible to point to a number of applications operating with a reasonable degree of success. The University of Massachusetts' Books for College Libraries program, the University of Chicago Library Systems, and the Ohio College Library Center shared system are a few examples which can be cited. The success OCLC has had in sharing high developmental and operational costs among a number of libraries is particularly significant for the libraries the Committee is dealing with. Predictions for dramatic reductions in computer costs and improved communications technology, if realized soon, should make computer applications a partial answer to rising processing costs in the future, though dramatic benefits will not be likely.

Miniturization of library materials will be part of the answer to stemming the physical growth of library collections, and it is clear that microforms will account for an increasingly significant portion of library holdings in coming decades. The expansionist atmosphere that pervaded higher education in the Sixties and the availability of federal grants made possible new buildings or major additions to old ones on many campuses across the country. Federal funds are no longer available to offset rising construction costs and the mood of austerity in the Seventies will make justification for added space much more difficult. More and more libraries will find the space-saving aspects of microforms increasingly attractive.

Cooperation and sharing of resources among libraries has been a fundamental tenet of librarians, but only in exceptional instances have formal cooperative programs between libraries achieved what might be termed unqualified success. The exigencies of income insufficient to meet the demands placed upon them are now likely to force libraries and their parent institutions to invest the kind of money, effort, and planning in cooperative programs that can make them effective. Networks based on computer and telecommunications are likely to be commonplace by the end of the next decade, and many of the area, state-wide, and multi-state consortia that have come into being over the past years will doubtless emerge from the next decade much stronger as rising costs of providing adequate service on a stand-alone basis meets the cost of providing an equal level of service through cooperative programs. Centralized storage, regional media centers, coordinated acquisitions programs, rapid communications and delivery service for interlibrary loan, are a few of the obvious kinds of activities that will receive more emphasis and realistic support in the near future than they have in the past.

Assignment of costs will shift to reflect more accurately the service which incurred the charge. For example, research libraries which are heavily drawn upon for interlibrary loans must be relieved of the cost of providing the service so that continued growth of their research collections is not jeopardized. When reciprocity of borrowing is not possible, some means of reimbursing the lending libraries will have to be found, either through charges to the user or his institution, or to public funds made available for the purpose.

Planning, programming and budgeting systems, however controversial, are likely to come into increased prominence as librarians will be called upon to establish priorities and allocate limited resources to meeting them. A greater emphasis on management principles in library operations will be called for. Parent institutions, under constant pressure to stem rising costs, will demand greater accountability from their libraries, and librarians will need to demonstrate in concrete terms the benefits of library expenditures and relate them to the goals of the institution. Sophisticated means to relate budgets to programs and productivity in all areas of library operations will be required, and standards will be one of the tools needed for the task.

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